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MORALS IN HISTORY.

MAN is an historical being. There may be moments in which he feels the past of his race to be an oppressive burden, which weighs him down. For this past is not embodied in his case, as in the case of other living beings, unconsciously in his organization; it forces itself into his consciousness, expanding and deepening it, but also how often confusing it. He loses in energy and freshness of direct volition what he gains in freedom and sureness of discursive judgment. This, however, is not the place to develop the theme which has been recently treated by the distinguished German writer, Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Advantageous and Disadvantageous Bearings of History on Life." Whatever view may be held concerning this question, it seems to me beyond doubt that even the most active minds and the most radical theories of our time cannot, at least to a certain degree, do without the historical method, and this constitutes perhaps one of the most important characteristics which distinguish the progressive movement at the close of our century from that at the close of the last century. The latter was essentially unhistorical, was indeed opposed to history; for us the work has not been in vain which the nineteenth century has devoted to the experience of the past. And so, perhaps, the coming time will also find the way to that which has been for all former centuries only a beautiful dream, or an abandoned commonplace of the schools; to use the past as an instructive object-lesson for the future, so that what Bacon and Hobbes set up as the aim of science in general shall apply also to history, namely, that the end of knowledge is power.

These thoughts may justify our placing an historical observation at the opening of a literary essay, which is offered not simply in the service of scientific contemplation, but which attempts to aid in the practical building up of the future. On the wide ocean of human life it is necessary to make certain

as to what point one has really reached. What has been often gives distinct indications of what can be and ought to be. Upon closer investigation many a doubt might easily be removed as to the right and feasibility of that which the founders of this quarterly review entertain as their object,—doubts which are always rising afresh out of a traditional and inadequate conception of the past. I will here attempt to specify and with the aid of history to remove some of the doubts which have most often been presented to me, and which are liable to weaken confidence in the future of the ethical movement.

I.

Of all the speculative sciences, ethics has perhaps had the most difficult fight against the disadvantage of necessarily changeable tendencies of thought. Although the palladium of the eighteenth century was highly prized and enthusiastically guarded, it seemed to be compelled to submit to the fate of an old-fashioned article of dress. The word "virtue," once the embodiment of sublime feelings and noble conduct, can now scarcely be heard without provoking an ambiguous smile. Whatever in morals is still useful seems self-evident; and what is not self-evident is thrown overboard as superfluous ballast and as empty subtility. Morality, it is said, is a product of the undeveloped art of life of former centuries. What these were unable to effect by more vigorous means was put into commandments, which were placed under the protection of the gods, and were repeated to men again and again as pious aspirations, in hopes of moving their hearts and softening their hard judgments. Find a place, therefore, for morals in the nursery and in the pulpit; science, the science which guides the history of nations and determines their future, has nothing to do with it. Morality, others have said, is not a dynamic but only a static element in human society. Its essential contents have remained the same for centuries. Also its efficiency has remained the same, as is seen by the endlessly-repeated complaints of moralists about the corruption of the world and the depravity of man. If mankind has from

the earliest times known what was morally required of it, and yet has continually sinned against these ancient imperatives, evidently no progress can issue from them, much rather must all real progress which has been made owe its origin to other powers, and it does not pay always to keep pouring new water into this vessel already full of holes.

With a different application and for different ends, the representatives of the church's doctrine of the universe are heard to express a similar thought,—that Christian morality cannot be improved upon, and that man is incapable of living up to the Christian ideal. If, with the former critics, the practical significance of morality and of its scientific formulation, ethics is depreciated in order to favor natural science and political economy, here the same thing is done in order to favor ecclesiastical doctrine and biblical tradition. That stability which, on the one side, is brought forward as an objection to morality, and on account of which it is not counted among the moving forces of the world's history, is claimed by the other side as the special excellence of ecclesiastical and religious ethics; and over against it are held up the fluctuations of moral opinions, the confusing diversity of standards, and the uncertainty of all principles based on them. No morality,—so it is preached on this side,—no morality without authority. And what is the distinguishing feature of authority? The absence of discussion, a unified, closed will. If this be once conceded, there can be no philosophical morality independent of religious authority, but only a morality of the philosophers, and a different kind is conceivable for each person. There are almost as many kinds of morality as there are systems. But if even this manifoldness were much less than it is, the truth would still remain of what Schopenhauer, with correct insight, placed as a motto at the beginning of his essay "On the Foundation of Morals:" "To preach morality is easy; to give the rational ground for it is hard."

What first strikes us in these criticisms is a problem which has occupied ethical investigation to a considerable degree, and for a long time has vexed it. When philosophical reflection first attempted to fix the contents of the moral con-

sciousness in conceptions, one thing appeared by the very contents of this consciousness unavoidably required: moral principles must be thought of as secure against the arbitrariness of the individual, as inviolable, emanating from a higher will, founded in the nature of things and of men, unchangeable. To-day we easily penetrate both what was correctly conceived in this thought and also the optical illusion that accompanied it. That the moral standard by no means arises from the mere wish of the individual, that within it is announced a deliberate will, a power which bends the individual, while at the same time it seeks to lift him up, is also for us a psychological fact, which must be explained, but which dare not be explained away. But the independence of moral principles as regards the will of the individual has nothing at all in common with their unchangeableness. A glance at the history of morals, as it to-day lies widely extended before us, shows us the solution of the riddle, it reveals independence and changeableness always and everywhere side by side. So far as we are acquainted with men in social community, the will of the community speaks to the individual concerning his practical conduct with authority. Authority of the family, of the teachers, of public opinion, of priests, of judges; finally, as an inner appropriation of the will of these authorities, the authority of conscience, of practical reason, which naturally exists only in the individual, but through friction with the community becomes filled with a universally valid content. Every human being who is born into an organized community finds in it a common will, and certain practical standards were already completed in it; he has not made them, he has not been asked whether he would give his assent to them; he is told: "It has always been so, it shall be so in the future;" and if he seeks to change things he will everywhere strike hard against the surrounding will, which is stronger than his own. Its commands often seem to the individual to be without any reason, to be mere authority, to be a hard fact, to which one must adapt one's self. Their origin is lost in the mysterious darkness of primitive times, or of divine revelation; continuous development has covered it over.

Here is the cause of that optical illusion of which I spoke. What the individual has not seen come into existence seems to him to have existed without a beginning, and that over which no power is granted to him, seems unchangeable. It is science which first extends the individual's circle of experience. The study of history does for him in sociology what the telescope and microscope do in natural science. The conscience of the individual exhibits the moral standard as unchangeable and without beginning; historical investigation shows that they shift and advance continually along with the change of generations and civilizations. It is here as in other departments of knowledge. To the *naïve* consciousness the "earth" seems to lie fixed under foot, as the eternally unchangeable theatre of all that happens there and that passes by like fleeting shadows of clouds; to the eye schooled by science, the earth reveals itself every moment as the result of a long process of change, as the hoary product of time, which is subject incessantly to the transforming influence of the same forces which have made it. And unchangeably, like the "eternal" earth itself, seemed also the races of living beings upon it to propagate their like, species for species, according to the same inviolable law, the same plant springing from the same seed, and the same germ producing the same animal as it did thousands of years ago.

This old biological principle of the constancy and unchangeableness of species and its displacement, or rather transformation by the theory of evolution, offers, perhaps, the best parallel to the old ethical belief in the unchangeableness of moral laws. The modification of species and the development which the biology of our century has shown to be the fundamental law of organized life, dominate also the expressions of life in the social organism. Morality, too, is a product of evolution, and is in a state of continual transformation. We understand this process since we have penetrated the mystery of great effects out of small causes. That commanding will of the community is a phenomenon consisting of an accumulation of elements; and the work-shop where those gigantic energies are made ready, which seem to press

down upon the individual, is still nothing else than the conscience of individuals themselves. For there takes place, quietly but unavoidably, that judgment concerning the worth of what the outside authorities require. In those inner heart-struggles, of the tragedy of which all personal, confidential history is full, the individual will is wrestling with the communal will. Now at first resentful and indignant, and then upon riper experience overcome, although, perhaps, by the inner reasonableness itself of the thing contended against. At another time, perhaps, docile at first, but gradually with even greater surety and confidence, recasting in the fire of one's own enthusiasm the standards and ideals which authority had bequeathed. In these struggles many tears are shed, which fall on hard rock until they finally wear it away. Many sighs are uttered, although not heard; and how often do the conquerors, whose valuations of moral worth will be appreciated only in the future, pay for the victory of their will with the bitterest sacrifice of outward happiness. For in some form or other the authority of the communal will always has the cross ready for those who assume a higher way of thinking and living, and who "reveal to the rabble their inner vision."

Morality is a product of evolution, we said before. But all evolution—so teaches biology—is adaptation of the organic individual to the changeable conditions of its environment. The sum of the ethical principles or ideals, which at any time are current in any nation, presents nothing else, therefore, than the conception of all that is reciprocally required in a practical direction of its members, for the advantage and profit of the community and the individual persons in it. The requirements of social adaptation are raised into the consciousness of the community. What these are can only be determined with regard to the given social conditions taken together. If we suppose the case of a society that has radically erred as to its requirements, the consequence of such a false adaptation would be, as with any other living being, destruction. But it can only be determined by experiences which have been passed through, and by valuations of conduct which

have become generally current through experience and have entered into the general consciousness.

If we reflect upon this point, we easily perceive that full harmony between the practical needs of a time and its ethics, even in the most favorable case, can only be a transitory one. The moral ideas which are prevailing in the general consciousness are always a step behind the times; what to-day is believed and professed by all was yesterday the conviction of a select circle, and the day before yesterday the signal for martyrdom. Under the action of this idea, at first held by a few and now become universal, the times themselves have become something else, and new needs make themselves felt. The masses still swear by the old gospel; only a few thoughtful and finely organized natures feel, under the cover of the old faith, the pulse-beat of the new and try to change their practice to suit these symptoms. This is a characteristic which all great mental crises—the rise of Christianity, the reformation, the eighteenth century—have clearly manifested, and which we in the highest measure see exhibited before our eyes in the socialistic movement of the day.

And what are the conditions which enable the individual will to carry out its own ideals over against the current ones, to establish a new law and transform the general will? None other than those upon which the formation of new organs in general is dependent. The new principles must be of assistance to felt needs; they must be founded in the vital relations of the social body; men must feel that through the new principles fresh energies awaken in them and old injuries are brought to an end. This foundation in the nature of things and of men, this fruitful quickening energy is what distinguishes the world-historical ideal from the dream of a hot-brained enthusiast; in it must the many, who have eaten their bread with tears and in the still hours have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, find expressed what has moved them in their innermost being, what they have darkly conceived, but have not been able to express, or to bring into currency against the overpowering will of their environment.

Starting with this in sight, one must describe the notion of

the absolute immutability of morality as equally erroneous with the opposite notion, represented by scepticism in all times, which overlooked the constant features in morality in attending to its variable elements. Neither notion can stand the test of a severe biological experiment. Both owe their origin to an essentially unhistorical method. It is easy to bring together from the ethical writings and the history of morals among different peoples a list of quite identical rules of conduct and moral customs, as Buckle did, in order to show that morality has made no progress at all in thousands of years, that what it can call its own possession has been believed in,—to use the formula of the Roman Church,—“*semper ubique, ab omnibus.*” It is equally easy, with Hume and other leading thinkers, to prove from the same sources that such a thing as a common moral basis for the human race does not exist at all,—that here, instead of unity and unchangeableness, the most variegated manifoldness, indeed a chaotic confusion, prevails.

The same holds good if one, leaving the wide historical point of view, directs his gaze to a narrower connection,—the development of Christian morals. Here also the Roman Catholic dogmatist and church historian can, with an appearance of success and justification, resort ever again to the artifice of proving that the whole development of doctrine in his church is already contained, as in a seed, in the gospels; or the Protestant scholar can present the evangelical church congregation of the nineteenth century as a copy of original Christianity. From the point of view of unbiased investigation we must smile over the one as over the other, and yet we must recognize that a little grain of truth lies in both conceptions, that even Christian ethics, as taught in the different confessions to-day, is a product of evolution, which in all changes has retained a certain fundamental type, and we cannot deny the connection with its original form.

A glance at modern biology might best elucidate the matter. We would scarcely attribute even the beginnings of scientific insight to the biologist, who would to-day, on account of the immeasurable fulness of organized forms, see only the

manifoldness and the chaos; and, on the other hand, we would justly refer the natural philosopher, who would undertake to construct all those varieties of forms perhaps out of one single fundamental form, to speculation concerning the manifoldness of nature. Ever more and more definitely before the eyes of the investigator there arises out of the apparently confusing manifoldness a fundamental type of organic forms of life; it remains the task of science, while at the same time investigating this unity, which as such nowhere exists but is only imaginary, to attempt to understand the laws and conditions of its highly varied manifestations. Society is the highest organism which we know,—an organism, the cells of which have consciousness. Morality we have defined as the sum of what this organism for the purpose of its preservation and the development of its members requires, raised into the consciousness of the community.

Now, to speak biologically, it is self-evident that certain requirements in every social organism just as typically return as certain fundamental forms in the manifoldness of plant and animal organisms. But this typical regularity as little constitutes the concrete morality of any given culture as that organic fundamental type makes its appearance in any one special living being. It contains nothing further than the general physiological conditions for the existence of organic life in general. But the richness of its morphological structure is in detail modelled and formed by the definite relations of development. And although certain principles recur in the moral systems of all civilized peoples, still it would be blindness to the living reality to regard them therefore simply as identical, without considering how different the position can be, which the same commandment takes in the whole system of life.

II.

From this point also the question may be settled, whether there is progress in morality. This question is weighted down with numerous misunderstandings due to inexact analysis. I shall, therefore, try at the outset to fix more exactly the possible meaning of the question.

It may be taken to mean, whether there is progress in morality as a system of principles for the practical conduct of man, whether there is a higher construction of moral ideals. This question has sometimes been described as essentially a blunder. Attention is called to the fact that the moral ideals of every time and people, according to the definition given above, are nothing else than a product of a definite stage of development; that they, therefore, may be judged only according to the service which they render to the social body in question, and that a judgment as to their worth irrespective of this concrete connection is irrational. As little as a student of nature would prefer phanerogamic to cryptogamic plants or echinodermata to coelenterata, as little as he would place the coal age above the jurassic period, so little could any one compare the ethics of the Indo-brahmanic culture with that of the Mohammedan or Greek, or both with that of our modern European culture. No one of these great systems of practical conduct and social order can be better than the other; each is exactly as good as the eye of the most far-seeing and the best had attained in the whole of the civilized world to which it owed its origin.

But these reflections hit the mark only in part. They are valid as a warning against hasty analogies between unrelated systems, against thoughtless judgment and condemnation of historical phenomena of morals, before one has scarcely learned their inner cause, their *raison d'être*, and before one has assured one's self what the condemned practice meant under the conditions of life in those times. It would equally be a sign of partiality, if we should refuse to make any relative valuations. Even the biologist does not refuse to do so. The continuous organic development has spread out before him an infinite variety of forms, in which the organic life becomes ever more richly differentiated, integrated towards even greater unity, and on the whole appears always more efficient in function. He, therefore, is quite right in constructing ascending and descending curves, and in gauging the relative perfection of single groups with one another, according to what they from an historical evolutionary point of view may signify; he

will also compare the animal and plant worlds of different periods with one another, and will undoubtedly speak of a progress in nature. This would not be dragging foreign categories into the matter, but only measuring nature by herself, by her own productions.

In just the same manner may the student of ethics proceed. The moral development of mankind itself, which he pursues through the thousands of years of its growth, forces upon his sight an ideal of social moral life, the outlines of which to a certain extent must be indistinct, but which, if he knows how to see and hear, still will express an inward tendency of the whole development, and for that very reason can be used as a standard for measuring the separate facts. We surmise to-day the possibility of a condition in which the supremacy of man over nature—that presupposition of all civilization—will not be bought with extreme slavery and an unjust treatment of the greater part of mankind; a condition in which the necessary action and reaction between individuals and society will be regulated in such a way that the individual can be active with all his best energies in the service of the community, and society will apply its inexhaustible resources to conferring upon all individuals the outward and inward conditions for the unfoldment of their personality. The circle is becoming continually greater of those over whom the strict import of the conception of humanity is extended; over the circle of the family, of the tribe, of believers in the same faith, of cast; this ideal of humanity is stretching also beyond the limits of the great nations, and is awaking a cosmopolitan feeling of universal solidarity among men. At the same time the contents of this conception is deepening; to-day we are well aware that true humanity does not dispense alms but rights, and tries to develop energies where before oppression and weakness reigned. And so the development of humanity is accompanied by an increasing tenderness towards individuals within the limits unchangeably set by the needs of the community. Also more exactly fitted to the ends, that is, more rational, are becoming the means by which we strive to actualize our ideals; the consciousness is continually becoming

clearer, with which all moral principles and judgments are referred to what they signify for the welfare of the race and for its capacity to develop.

Hegel, in his grandiose manner, once tried to delineate with three strokes the inner course of the world's history in saying, "In antiquity and the East one person is free; in the civilization of classic antiquity and of the European Middle Ages a few persons are free; but it is the aim of history that all shall be free." If we interpret the idea of freedom to mean that which alone it can mean in the sense of our present social ethics, the idea of morally completed personality, together with the indispensable outward conditions as the basis of the moral life, we have thereby delineated, in fact, the highest which we can expect from the development of mankind.

Can it be called imposing alien arbitrary standards, when we take into account the individual phases of human culture, their ethical ideals and the practical application of these, what they have contributed to the advancement of that object, or how they are related to it? To me this seems to be as little the case as when the biologist compares the flora and fauna of former periods of the earth with the present forms of organic life, and notes in the former enormous waste of energy and bulk, the relative poverty of forms, the inadequate development of the organic functions in comparison with the later achievements of nature. This judgment as to relative worth is as unavoidable as the perception of the necessity that at that time no higher achievement was possible. It is the same in the history of the moral world.

Many of the moral ideals and forms of life of which history informs us, appear to us to-day as strange and remarkable as the picture of the earth, when, according to the descriptions of palæontologists, the mainland was covered with those gigantic fern forests, which furnish us to-day, in the form of coal, with warmth and light, or was peopled with mammoths. Only to a much greater extent do such survivals of human development affect our existence than those past periods of the earth's history. I do not speak of the East and the scarce remains of uncivilized tribes; Europe also is full of such rarities, and

especially in our century has much which was regarded as buried shown itself, to the astonishment of all, to be thoroughly alive.

We may perfectly understand these things in their remote origin, and in their former utility, without therefore excusing everything in them, that is, without regarding them as legitimate, also for the future. Their historical efficiency, which we are in a position to observe, has brought much to light which in their cradle was not recognizable, has shown up many an error, has made many a means obsolete, has overthrown many a principle. Certainly every advance of evolution must be bought with certain sacrifices. Many great features of the older ideals, many a gain of the past order of life, many characteristics of the former type of man have passed away never to return, or, if at all, can be won back only by a long round-about journey. Throughout the literature of all modern nations is heard a sigh for the lost beauty of ancient Greece, the "kalokagathia" of the human race, physically and ethically developed. Perhaps the poets of coming centuries, with the same yearning which is uttered in Schiller's "Gods of Greece," will sing of the secret mysteries of the Christian faith and of the foreboding awe with which they filled the men of a former time. The poets may allow themselves both these things; but the historian of civilization and students of ethics will also see the other side of the matter, and earnestly compel himself to remember the ground of slavery, delusion, persecution, and narrow-minded inhumanity on which those splendors were reared.

The question, therefore, whether there is progress in moral ideals and principles, is the same as if it were asked, whether there is in mankind any progress in general. Only blindness can deny that there is. Whoever compares life to-day in its tendencies with former periods sees quickly that we are undertaking to solve problems about which men formerly did not think at all, or that we attempt through the unified forces of social organization to achieve what was formerly laid wholly upon the weak shoulders of the individual. But with the greatness of the task assumed, with the mass of those

upon whom it bears, grows also the difficulty of the solution, and this difficulty is both external and internal.

This leads us to another meaning of the question as to the progress of morality. "The moral ideals may advance, but do men become therefore better?" "Through all centuries complaint is heard about the corruption and degradation of men, about the inadequate actualization of moral ideals, about the moral deficit that can in no way be cancelled, which one generation hands over to an other. Is this an illusion? Is progress, also in this sense, taking place?" Here we seem to be confronted by a problem of the solution of which even the boldest statistician must despair. Still if the morality of the individual, the degree of his inward adaptation to the ethical requirements of his times and of his nation, is a quite incommensurable factor, the determination of which, in many cases, would only be successfully attempted by an all-knowing judge, how could it be possible to appraise aright the moral efficiency of whole generations over against each other? A hopeless undertaking indeed!

To be sure, in historical presentations, certain periods are by preference described as times of social corruption and moral decay, while others are honored with epithets of praise for their moral purity and the like, but upon closer observation it becomes clear that this old-fashioned moralizing method can give the ethical student no real advantage in dealing with our problem. Those praised ages of "simplicity and purity" are for the most part periods of very primitive and undeveloped conditions of life, in which only narrow tasks of civilization are to be performed, and the demands upon the individual's capacity for adaptation are very moderate, while the natural instincts and the moral ideals still lie very near together; but he who would turn back with Rousseau's yearning to the idyls of "the good and happy savage," should be reminded that under such circumstances, indeed, certain moral obliquities are apt to be lacking, which especially appear in a highly advanced state of culture, and constitute a favorite theme with historians, who paint pictures of manners; but that in their place, upon closer study, other defects are to be noticed, such

as naturally fitted the total circumstances of that age. For the pressure of the universal will upon the particular is from the beginning of social life unavoidable, and with this coercion begins a certain mutiny and transgression. Finally, it is to be remembered that as a rule in such condemnation of whole ages as morally corrupt, only special nations or classes of people are taken into the account, and that accordingly no inference from such phenomena can be made as to whether there is in the whole system of human civilization a rising or sinking of moral adaptation. While the prevailing Roman life wastes its energy and dignity in wild excesses, new moral ideals and enthusiastic resolutions grow up under its feet in Christianity; while Oriental Christianity is inwardly desolated by dogmatic subtleties, and is exhausted through endless divisions; it collapses beyond rescue before the more simple moral truths of Islam. The same process is continually repeated. The much-complained-of time of the decline of mediæval morality is only the disintegration of the knightly monastic ideal of life and its replacement through new moral conceptions which had grown in the bosom of the citizen class. And a similar process is completing itself before our eyes at present. The Bourgeoisie, with no other object than to retain as well as possible its acquired possessions, and to make the greatest possible use of them for pleasure, beholds with uneasy astonishment and with inadequate comprehension a number of new socialistic notions spring up out of the lap of the proletariat, which undoubtedly, after a proper amount of clashing with the moral forces of the old time, will dissolve the practical view of life of the citizen class in the same way as this once displaced the church-feudal idea.

If one keeps this in mind, the task of making any statement as to the growth of subjective morality in the human race seems almost impossible. At the risk of being accused of extravagant optimism, I should nevertheless like to submit to the consideration of the reader an hypothesis, which may at least claim a certain probability. It might perhaps be allowable to affirm that within any epoch of moral culture, the average man attains an average adaptation to the current

standard, while a relatively much smaller number do not come at all near to the normal moral type, or they show it in some striking distortion, and a still smaller fraction of the whole may be regarded as an excellent embodiment of the prevailing type. Finally, the smallest per cent. will consist of the more than normal men,—as such we may describe those minds, rare in any age, which, anticipating their fellow-men, already represent the moral thoughts of the future.

I renounce every attempt to express these relations in numbers, which could only rest on arbitrary assumptions, and I should simply like to express it as my opinion that, on the whole, these inner relations of morality remain unchanged, although, in accord with what has already been said, quite important shifting may take place at special times and in special stages. For it goes without saying that the relative numerical proportions of these four groups are different in times of progressive development from what they are during retrogressive evolution, in times of strong mental activity, from what they are during quiet periods of rest. But if one includes longer reaches of times or a whole circle of civilization, these differences cancel one another and leave the fundamental relation unchanged, which seems to lie in the essence of moral development.

Nevertheless the class, at all times large, of the *laudatores temporis acti* may possibly in a certain sense be right in thinking that, considered from the highest historical point of view, subjective morality—that is, the conformity of individuals to the standard—relatively declines as the higher elaboration of the moral ideals advances. This sounds at first very paradoxical and not very consoling; morality is said to grow ever finer and better and men worse; what would the out-come be? But one need not let one's self be led astray by this. Looked at in the light, this expresses only a necessary consequence of evolution. In the first place, there is nothing astonishing in the fact that the ideal requirements of man for practice advance more quickly than the capacity of the masses to conform thereto. Every enrichment and advance of the moral ideal which attains historical currency modifies as

quickly the standard of judgment, and much that to-day could still pass as normal must be described to-morrow in the light of new ideal requirements as subnormal. And the more complicated the texture of human society becomes, and the less the ideal forms of practical conduct which arise out of it harmonize with the natural forms, so much the more difficult becomes of course the adaptation,—according to the same biological law by which the disturbances that an organism is exposed to increase in geometrical relation according to the degree of complexity.

But much more important for the clearing up of this paradox is a certain other circumstance. The development of moral ideals is not simply intensive, but at the same time extensive; they do not only suffer an ever finer elaboration and purification, but they require to be applied as the standard to an ever-widening circle of mankind. Every social legislation which binds the individual originally reaches only to the nearest surroundings: blood relations, tribal relations, members of the same caste or station in life. One no more goes to the barbarian and the savage, the slave and the members of the proletariat, the infidel and the heretic, demanding moral worth and ideal development of personality, than one feels one's self under obligations to help him to attain it, or to recognize in him the moral personality. He remains for a long time outside the circle to which moral judgments and duties apply; or these apply to him only in the weakest form in which one is accustomed to apply them, in the association of man with the animal world. The advancing development of moral ideas strives more and more to break through these limitations; to substitute state morality for class morality, international for national, human for confessional morality. But it is clear that with this extension of the social reach of moral demands, the difficulties of really penetrating and controlling the new region embraced increase infinitely. Where formerly perfect discharge of duty seemed to prevail, as long as the moral dictation and judgment were limited to a narrow circle, there are discovered yawning chasms, as soon as the point of view in general has become so much higher. A

moral ideal, which in the smaller circle of a class or of a little community is perhaps able to influence the practical conduct of the majority, appears like a hopeless requirement, when applied to other and much greater relations and groups of men; and these themselves in its light appear backward and undeveloped. The conformity which in the case appeared already complete, seems now suddenly to have been removed into the distance; but the apparent loss of the present is the hope of the future.

Let us take the three thoughts which express the boldest advance in our time of the moral will beyond the established facts: the international unity of peace among civilized races, the overcoming of religious prejudices by means of human ethics, and the social and moral emancipation of the proletariat. From the moment when these thoughts with any definiteness assert themselves as moving ideas, a number of practices and institutions must fall into condemnation, or at least depreciation, although heretofore they have not lacked honorable recognition; but the difficulty of bringing about a moral conformity in those widely-extended circles over which these ideals stretch is so great, that at first and for an indefinite time the reality must remain far behind the model; and, if we nevertheless make it the measure of worth in judging the actual practices, the progress of objective morality, or the moral idea, must have as its consequence, an undeniable retrogression in subjective morality,—that is, a decrease of conformity to the model.

But this need by no means be the last word of historical development: continual progress in human ideals, continually more hopeless dragging behind of achievement and of actual institutions. Intelligence carries illumination into unknown paths which no one as yet has traversed, and it is only natural that this solitary light should make the surrounding darkness blacker, and many dusky larvæ are allured out of their holes, where till then they had been housed undisturbed. But the will finds the means of achieving what is clearly conceived. We have no occasion to be distrustful of the energies of our race. If we could have presented

to a Greek of the best time a picture of the existing moral culture of mankind to-day, and its pursuits of peace, he would have smiled at it as an impossible creation of fancy. There are many in the midst of our civilization who think themselves far superior to that Greek in wisdom, and yet who have no whit more insight than he, when one speaks to them of things still to be aspired after and attained; there are many who regard the insight and power of the last ten years, and the established order of things which at the time is to their satisfaction, to be the highest reach of humanity; and with self-satisfied resignation they "oppose the fist infernal" of denial "to the actively eternal, creative force, in cold disdain."

"*Huc usque*: who will go beyond is a dreamer and a utopian." Who knows? Perhaps these utopians are the true realists? Who has not often had the feeling that what we with pride call "our culture," and what our panegyrists with bold eagerness praise as the ripe growth of centuries, is a childish piece of bungling work; that our grandchildren must look down upon it with the feeling with which an artist or thinker from the height of his creation regards the first sketches in which he tried his strength,—a strange feeling made up of sympathy and aversion.

This, indeed, cannot be proved like a mathematical proposition; it is a belief; but not an irrational or a supernatural belief, rather one that rests upon the analogy of previous evolution.

What makes it still stronger is a circumstance which, in the comparisons of our time and of the difficulties of our civilization with former centuries, is generally overlooked: the increasing influence which our scientific knowledge must exercise, not only upon the industrial but also upon the social instinct. Daily do the indications become more numerous of the disappearance of the fanciful notion that we can make men happier and more nearly perfect only by means of inventions and machinery. The conviction is making rapid strides that even the widest lordship of man over nature must ultimately be a curse to the ruler himself, unless he succeeds

in establishing the more beautiful and important supremacy over man; that is, over the natural forces in his own breast,—the brutality of passion, the hardness of egoism, and the crudity of moral ignorance. But this can be the work only of scientific knowledge and of its increasing application to social ethical problems. Even for the right moral regulation of the individual life, the good-will is impotent if it does not appear joined with rational insight. The attempt to give a moral direction to the social body is miserable quackery, unless ripened historical and philosophical insight has guided the pen in making out such prescriptions. And scarcely a worse delusion can be thought of than that which believes that it can cure the moral and social crimes of our age with old-woman remedies, with the authorities and traditions of past centuries, and which accordingly has contempt for reason and science. Indeed, even for science with her speculations concerning life, an earnest warning is contained here, not to forget what life demands of her. And so these considerations may close with the words of a gifted woman,* which, with the clear penetration of disinterestedness, express our wishes in the most exact form, and would make the best motto I know of, to place in the front of this Review: “It fares ill with mankind and things will only get better, when our philosophers know more of the world and the world knows more of the philosophers.”

FR. JODL.

* Marie von Ebner Eschenbach.